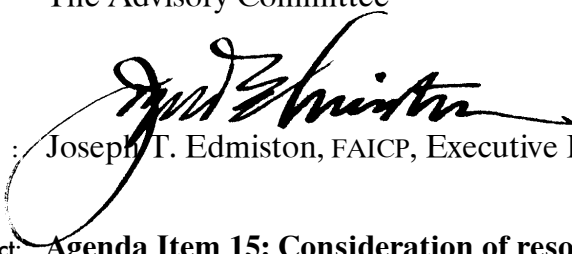


Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: August 30, 2004

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 50 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Project Planning and Design for the Soka University Acquisition project.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 50 funds in the amount of \$200,000.00 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for Project Planning and Design for the Soka University Acquisition project.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204(c) of Public Resources Code.

Background: The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has submitted a grant application for Proposition 50 funding in the sum of \$200,000 for project planning and design activities related to the acquisition of the Soka University property. The requested funding would be used for the MRCA's project planning and design activities that will lead directly to the fee simple acquisition of the 588-acre Soka University property, and for initial site improvements for public access to the property.

The Soka University property is located in the ecologically significant Malibu Creek watershed of the Santa Monica Mountains. All of the 588 acres currently offered for sale are located within the Coastal Zone, and the property is contiguous with Malibu Creek State Park. Wildlife resources are significant, as the property is a critical component of the central Santa Monica Mountains habitat linkage hub that contributes to both inter- and intra-mountain range wildlife movement. The southernmost documented population of the genetically unique Southern steelhead trout resides just downstream from the subject property.

Acquisition of the Soka property would protect regionally significant land and water resources within a major coastal watershed of the Santa Monica Bay pursuant to Division 23 (commencing with Section 33000) of the Public Resources Code. The MRCA has already obtained an appraisal of the property and has had initial communications with the seller. However, a great deal of work remains to finalize the transaction and open the property to the public.

Pre-acquisition activities will include preparation of a purchase agreement, filing necessary documents with the state and county as required, securing funding for the acquisition, setting up escrow, review of title reports and appraisals, obtaining environmental assessments, and property mapping and graphics to support the acquisition. Funding for the acquisition is expected to come from multiple sources, and will likely require many in-person meetings at various agency offices in Sacramento and Los Angeles. The acquisition is expected to be completed by December 31, 2004. The grant will also pay for some or all closing costs, because these costs may not be allowable expenses for the acquisition funding sources.

Post-acquisition activities will focus on implementation of initial site improvements to ensure adequate and safe public access, physical improvements to protect sensitive natural and cultural resources, and habitat restoration to maximize the value of the property for downstream Southern steelhead trout and all indigenous wildlife. Post-acquisition activities will commence immediately following the purchase, and will be completed by December 31, 2005.

All funded activities will be directly related to the acquisition, protection and restoration of land and water resources and associated planning, permitting and administrative costs for the proposed Soka University acquisition and enhancement as described above. Acquisition of the property will protect land and water resources resulting in the reduction of pollution, capture of additional storm water runoff, protection and management of ground water, and the provision of habitat for fish and wildlife.

The MRCA's efforts will include concerted coordination with other government agencies including the California Department for Parks and Recreation, the California Department of Fish and Game, the Wildlife Conservation Board, the National Park Service and the California Coastal Conservancy. The proposed Soka University acquisition and initial public access and resource protection improvements are consistent with the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan.

The project is eligible for funding under Chapter 10, Section 79750(c) of Proposition 50, and implements the goals stated in Chapter 1, Section 79501(f) of Proposition 50: "...reduce pollution of rivers, lakes, streams, and coastal waters, and provide habitat for fish and wildlife."

Consideration: The grant to the MRCA is \$200,000.00. \$119,500 would be used for pre-acquisition activities, and the remainder for post-acquisition activities.